THE NEW BOSTON: URBAN DESIGN SINCE 1940, ITS NATURE, HISTORY, THEORETICAL BASIS

From an architectural and urban design standpoint, the changes which have occurred in Boston during the past 30 years have been massive. Whether the city has been born again or rendered a multiple amputee depends on your point of view, but whatever you think of the New Boston, it is safe to describe its ascendency in terms of collision with, rather than evolution from, the old. For the most part old Boston and New Boston are different cities which only infrequently relate to one another.

In order to understand this phenomenon it is important to examine both the historical development of Boston prior to the 1940s, and the theoretical basis for the New Boston.

Five years after the Rev. William Blaxton established himself on the south slope of Beacon Hill in 1625, a group of Massachusetts Bay Company Puritan settlers led by John Winthrop landed at Charlestown. Finding fresh water to be a rarity, they relocated to the Shawmut Peninsula, which they renamed Boston, a few months later and set up their community in what is now the Old State House-Dock Square area. A plaque on the Exchange Building at 53 State Street marks the approximate location of Governor Winthrop's house.

By the 1640s Boston's identity was evident in the germination of its street pattern. While the irregularity of Boston's streets is romantically attributed to the meanderings of 17th century cows, it is more likely that it was a reasoned response to such topographical obstacles as hills, marshes, muddy sinks, and, most particularly,

the shoreline. The dominant influence was this irregular coast, which remained inviolate through the 18th century. During this period streets were extended and added according to the narrow and winding configuration originally established.

Although not technically a city until 1822, Boston acquired urban characteristics early in its development. "The chiefe Edifice of this City-like Towne," wrote Edward Johnson in 1654, "is crowded on the Seabankes, and wharfed out with great industry and cost, the buildings beautifull and large, some fairly set forth with Brick, Tile, Stone and Slate, and orderly placed with comly streets, whose continuall inlargement presages some sumptuous City. The wonder of this modern Age, (is) that a few yeares should bring forth such great matters by so meane a handfull."

20 years later, in 1674, John Josselyn reinforced Johnson's description: "The houses are for the most part raised on the sea-banks and wharfed out with great industry and cost, many of them standing upon piles, close together on each side of the streets as in London and furnished with many fair shops... with three Meeting Houses or Churches, and a Town-house built upon pillars where the merchants may confer... Their streets are many and large, paved with pebble stone." Josselyn pronounced Boston "the Metropolis of this Colony, or rather of the whole Countrey."

As a town of 6 or 7 thousand in the latter 17th century, Boston achieved its urban quality by virtue of its compactness, by the continuity of its streetscapes. Many of the elements mentioned by Johnson and Josselyn appeared on John Bonner's 1722 map of Boston, which included 42 streets, 36 lanes, 22 alleys, 3,000 houses

(1,000 of which were brick) and 40 wharves. Boston's population in 1722 had grown to 12,000, the largest in the colonies.

The urban mystique derives primarily from density, particularly horizontal density. A broken and fragmented street becomes essentially suburban if the buildings are small, or anti-urban if the structures and separating spaces are large.

Horizontal density is perhaps most evident in the medieval city of which Boston is, in terms of plan, the only example in America. (Or at least it was medieval until fragmented by New Boston planning in the 1950s and '60s.)

Rather than adopting the late Renaissance and Baroque planning concepts of the time, Boston's founders went back 200 years and laid out a medieval town with streets characterized by warped and winding lengths and expanding and contracting widths. The crowded late medieval tradition of the City of London was continued. First generation settlers came mostly from East Anglia and the southwestern counties of England and their home towns no doubt preserved- as many do to this day- their medieval quality.

Boston was more closely linked in concept to the great medieval cities of Europe like Bern, founded in 1191, and Strasbourg, than it was to contemporary cities of the Spanish colonies such as Potosi, Bolivia, founded in 1545, and North American cities like Philadelphia, all primarily based on the gridiron as shown in Holme's plan for Philadelphia of 1682.

The medieval city, from which Boston derives, took its irregular form from the vagaries of land allocation and from the interaction of public and private space, the two being defined according to their degree of

penetrability. Streets were as narrow as possible while allowing the transit of goods and passage of persons, widening occasionally for reasons of commerce. All streets were markets to some degree. In Boston Great Street (now State) was 113 feet wide for that purpose, eventually permitting construction of the Town House and then the Old State House at its center. Streets, rather than squares or plazas, were the public spaces in the medieval city.

From the Renaissance and on the history of urban development could be characterized as an attempt to disperse the density of the medieval city and to resolve its apparently unresolved confusion. In their rush toward Cartesian rationality, city planners missed the point of the medieval city's own inner logic- its intricate series' of subtle, ineluctable resolutions- much in the same way that the promoters and planners of the New Boston failed to fathom the intricate inner logic of the old.

City planning began with the Renaissance, when a number of geometrically based concepts for ideal cities emerged. Newly discovered perspective as a theoretical construction of space became the principal regulator of the urban network. Vistas and monuments are Renaissance in origin as is the adaptation of open space dimensions to the volumes of adjacent buildings. The Renaissance principle of axiality, of points of view, has dominated western planning ever since. The straightening and widening of the street begins here.

The great mid-16th century Renaissance square of Geraldo in Evora, Portugal, is more than a widening of the street. It is deliberately calculated to satisfy the eye, as is the Baroque Piazza del Popolo in Rome. The role given to the satisfaction of the eye

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Architectural styles changed, buildings grew larger, but gradually, in an evolutionary manner within the Boston character, the framework of which was its medieval street pattern.

When John Singleton Copley's land on the south slope of Beacon Hill was purchased by the Mt. Vernon Proprietors in 1795 and laid out in a modified grid by Mather Withington, the urbanization of the old Shawmut Peninsula was complete. From then on Boston expanded through a combination of extended shoreline and annexation of surrounding towns, beginning with South Boston in 1804 and ending with Hyde Park in 1912.

Shawmut's original 783 acres were multiplied by filling bays, coves and inlets beginning with West, Mill and South Coves during the first decade of the 19th century. Charles Bulfinch, the dominant figure in Boston architecture and planning from about 1790 to 1817, applied the grid to Boston Neck in 1801 and laid out the Mill Pond as a grid within a triangle in 1807. South Boston development began in 1805 and the South End shortly thereafter, proceeding slowly until the 1850s when the area blossomed into a region of symetrical blocks, brick and brownstone mansarded bowfronts, and a series of shaded squares according to the tone set by architect N.J. Bradlee.

Generally credited to Arthur Gilman, the imposing Back Bay plan with its long vistas suggestive of Parisian boulevards, was adopted in 1856 with construction largely completed by the 1880s when Frederick Law Olmsted's undulating park system was woven into the city form.

Although the 19th century developments generally exhibited more regular street patterns, each was carefully grafted onto the gnarled

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Shawmut trunk and they all grew as one tree. There were only occasional disruptive elements, such as ramrod railroads piercing the city at various points. Robert Flemming Gourlay's grandiose Baroque "General Plan for Enlarging and Improving the City of Boston" of 1844 was, fortunately, not implemented.

As Boston grew its architecture changed in an evolutionary manner according to current styles and demands of the expanding city. Its horizontal density, its human scale, its variety persisted. Even the modest height of its buildings was maintained, with but a few exceptions, well into the 20th century. When in 1903 A. H. Vinal's 48 Beacon Street spurted to a height of 12 stories, well beyone the bounds of propriety, Boston answered with the first comprehensive height of building law in the U.S., 125 feet for business and 80 feet for residential areas.

During the period of skyscraper intoxication in cities like New York and Chicago, Boston steadfastly maintained its anti-highrise bias. The lone exception, over which Bostonians had no control, was Peabody and Stearns' Custom House Tower, completed in 1915. It was not until the late '20s and early '30s that the skyline was again broken, this time by several Art Deco structures like the United Shoe Machinery Building of 1929 and the Post Office of 1931, whose heights were considerably mitigated by their setbacks and detail.

Even when Boston had the opportunity to alter the scale of its architecture it was reluctant to do so. Buildings erected immediately after the disastrous downtown fire of 1872, for example, were not, for the most part, substantially higher than those they replaced, as can be seen in the old Jordan Marsh Main-Shuman block.

Boston's evolutionary physical development can be attributed in part to the relatively gradual growth of its population, at least until the period of Irish immigration from the 1850s and on. The count of 137,000 in 1850 rose to 342,000 by 1875 and eventually peaked at 801,000 in 1950. Development was consistent with population to that point, but, ironically, since that time the inverse has been true. Boston's massive redevelopment program since 1950 has accompanied a steep population decline to 641,000 in 1970, where it has leveled off.

Boston entered the 1940s in a slightly shabby but essentially intact condition. For decades the city had assumed a kind of Rip Van Winkel pose, anathama to politicians intent on leaving visible legacies. Deciding to stir up the chickens one morning in 1947, Mayor James Michael Curley dispatched a platoon of Public Works Department hit men to Beacon Hill. They set upon the sidewalks of West Cedar Street with picks and shovels, intent on replacing those hallowed bricks with concrete. After several days of confrontation with local matrons, the mayor backed down and recalled his troops. The New Boston was averted for a time, a very short time.

In 1950 Christopher Iannella ran for state representative from the North and West Ends, campaigning as much against the proposed Central Artery as against his opponent, Angelo Berlandi. Iannella won the election but lost his cause. As the first phase of the New Boston, the Artery, a serpentine elevated expressway, slashed through medieval downtown Boston leaving an ugly still open wound. The North End and Waterfront were separated from the rest of the city. Many old streets and buildings were lost. Others, like Gridley Bryant's 1857 Mercantile Wharf and 1858 State Street Block, were left as amputees.

The Bulfinch Mill Pond Triangle was split in two. Rather than bringing life blood to the city, the Artery conveyed such urban poisons as traffic and pollution. It became, in effect, Boston's large intestine.

With its northern and southern sections completed in 1954 and 1959 respectively, the Artery became the first stage of the 1948 Master Highway Plan to be implemented. Designed with a 30-year lifespan, the Artery is scheduled to wear out in George Orwell's year of 1984. The total plan called for 8 radial routes projecting from the Inner Belt expressway. For part of its length, the Belt, a kind of intown 128, was to have been routed through an updated Emerald Necklace. While this section of the Olmsted Park System was fortunately not "updated", its connection with the Charles River was ravished by Storrow Drive and its Charlesgate interchange completed in 1955. Whereas the elevated Central Artery became a visual barrier, grade level Storrow Drive physically separated Beacon Hill and Back Bay from the Charles River and its esplanade.

"The current American way of life," wrote Lewis Mumford in 1958, "is founded not just on motor transportation but on the religion of the motor car, and the sacrifices that people are prepared to make for this religion stand outside the realm of rational criticism... In short, the American has sacrificed his life as a whole to the motor car, like someone who, demented with passion, wrecks his home in order to lavish his income on a capricious mistress who promises delights he can only occasionally enjoy." In line with this imagery, those motor cars which were every American's desire were described by Mumford as "indecently tumescent chariots."

Following the passage of the Federal Highway Act in 1956, Washington embarked on a $26 billion program which would eventually establish the cloverleaf as our national flower. Boston would have become a second Los Angeles had it not been for Governor Sargent's perspicacious cancelling of the Inner Belt expressway in February of 1970. Unfortunately land had already been cleared for I95 through Roxbury and the South End and the Mass Pike had managed to slither through the Back Bay in 1965 to connect with the Central Artery in a series of drunken gyrations in South Cove. Thus another barrier had been installed, this one a big ditch, further segretating parts of the city.

Highways and highrises comprise the visible legacy of urban redevelopment in America since 1950, euphemistically referred to as "urban renewal." What started out in theory as a federal program of city rehabilitation and revitalization quickly became total clearance of large urban sites followed by massive new construction of a scale and type more often than not in conflict with its setting. Boston was particularly savaged because of the fragile and fine grain of its medieval plan and the rich and diverse character of its architecture.

Underwriting for urban redevelopment in general and the New Boston in particular came from the Housing Act of 1949, which authorized the U.S. government to enter into contracts with local redevelopment authorities to finance slum clearance and urban renewal projects. Over 12% of Boston's land area fell under this program, with 437 acres being in the dense, architecturally rich downtown. Thousands of irreplaceable buildings from all periods succumbed to progress.

Entire neighborhoods with ancient street patterns were obliterated. Three mayors enthusiastically presided over the carnage; John B. Hynes through the 1950s, John F. Collins from 1960 through 1967, Kevin H. White since 1968.

New York Streets, conceived in 1953 as Boston's first urban renewal project, contained those negative elements which have characterized almost all subsequent redevelopment projects. 10 banal industrial buildings and a new street system replaced a 22 acre residential community along Albany Street. A neighborhood was eradicated, historic buildings were lost, urban character was degraded, and the area, though modest in size, suffered long term project-induced blight. Completion took 11 years.

Also in 1953 the chief of the Urban Redevelopment Division of the Boston Housing Authority, Kane Simonian, prepared a report describing the West End as an "over populated neighborhood densely covered with over-age buildings along narrow streets." As the Boston Redevelopment Authority's first director in 1957, Simonian proceeded to take care of those over-age buildings by taking down 47 acres of them, expelling 12,000 people and 300 businesses in the process. Developer Jerome Rappaport and architect Victor Gruen conspired to conjure up that project euphemistically known as Charles River Park.

The West End's problems with survival date from the 1930s when housing expert Nathan Straus recommended demolition and replacement with public housing. No action was taken until after World War II when newly available federal slum clearance money encouraged a second look by the Boston Housing Authority which promptly recommended

demolition, not only of the West End, but of the North and South Ends as well. Planning, begun by the Authority in 1951, originally contemplated a mixed package of new construction and rehabilitation, retaining some of the existing street pattern. Mortgage bankers, however, opposed the retention of older buildings.

As second bidder, Rappaport, recently active in Mayor Hynes reelection campaign, claimed his prize when the highest bidder dropped out. Victor Gruen's final plan of 1959 called for almost total clearance and the complete erasure of the street pattern. The luxury development was approved by the mayor, council, bankers, business leaders, and even the archdiocese, whose parish church, St. Joseph's, was among the 3 or 4 buildings considered historically significant enough to save. Construction began in March 1960 and to this day is incomplete, with a proposed hotel plot still vacant. Rappaport demonstrated his deep concern for the displaced neighborhood by agreeing under duress to build 150 units of elderly housing which he thoughtfully located hard by the elevated Green Line.

As a social tragedy the West End has been graphically documented by sociologist and planner Herbert J. Gans in his classic book, The Urban Villagers. Gans pointed out that a slum for planners was good housing and a preferred neighborhood for those who lived there: it was home. As an architectural outrage and an urban design disaster, Charles River Park will remain for all to see for years to come.

Designed in deliberate isolation from Boston, the primarily highrise luxury housing development stands as a gilded ghetto over the grave of a vital neighborhood. Architecturally the buildings are banal and commercial looking. Materials ranging from pastel glazed brick to

concrete, metal and glass, are cheap. Construction- at least of earlier phases- is shoddy. Urban planning- clearly designed to look good on the drawing board- is cluttered and confusing at street level. Scattered apartment towers hover awkwardly over a miscellany of smaller structures: townhouses, garages, commercial and institutional buildings. Charles River Plaza, a standardized suburban shopping center appropriately anchored by a Holiday Inn, indecently exposes its parking lot to Cambridge Street and Beacon Hill beyond.

In an article published in Old Time New England in 1961, Abbott Lowell Cummings characterized the leveling of the West End as "devestation unmatched since that of the fire of 1872 in the downtown area." He went on to point out that while some buildings were "beyond reclamation, the ancient street pattern, the 18th century street names and many pleasant brick townhouses of the period between 1800 and 1850 had survived in only partially rundown condition. Though not necessarily historic landmarks, these houses were nevertheless distinguished by their good lines, many original features, and a patina which only time and associations can create." The synthetic materials of Charles River Park have been carefully fabricated to be immune to patina.

At about the time of the ravishing of the West End, ex-Lever Brothers president and super soap salesman turned architect, Charles Luckman, was busy dredging up his plan for the Prudential Center. The Pru was designed in L.A. for L.A. but inexplicably ended up in the Back Bay. Substituting its own colossal blight for that of the Boston and Albany Railroad yards, it also swept away one of Boston's most extravagant structures, William G. Preston's Mechanics Building,

considered the largest in the country on its completion in 1881. A compendium of planning errors, the Pru became a cornerstone of the New Boston at its dedication on April 19, 1965, the date on which, according to Nathan Cobb in The Globe, "Boston came down with highrise fever."

Sigfried Giedion described it as "a purely profit-making structure of no urbanistic interest." Less charitably, Wolf Von Eckardt wrote: "Charles Luckman dumps his ugly, illiterate 50-story Prudential Tower amidst the gentle old houses of Boston's Back Bay for no other purpose than to dwarf John Hancock...and the only result is the tragic ruin of Boston's long cherished skyline." John Hancock, of course, eventually got even.

With coincidental irony, Lever Brothers had moved their headquarters from Boston to the newly completed trend-setting Lever House on New York's Park Avenue in 1952, a few short years before its president returned here as a reincarnated architect to wreck his vengeance.

In an economic sense, Prudential Center is the father of all subsequent large scale development in Boston, for it was also the begetter of the so-called 121A tax agreement, which permitted selected large developers to negotiate predictable and favorable long term tax rates. Thus the New Boston was off and running by virtue of being given tax preference over the old.

The Pru established itself as the western terminus, the tail bone, if you will, of the High Spine, a concept promoted by the Boston Society of Architects in the late 1950s for the deployment of a series of towers linking the Back Bay extremities with the downtown. As a

strictly drawing board notion that made no sense from pedestrian level, those transplanted vertebrae simply serve as a banal backdrop to the elegantly encrusted 19th century Back Bay cityscape.

Prudential Center is a mixed use complex consisting of highrise office, apartment and hotel towers plus low rise commercial buildings grouped around the outsized 52-story metal and glass Prudential Tower. The entire conglomeration is set on a raised platform which effectively isolates it from its host city. The pedestrian spaces are bleak, dreary and, of course, windy. The shopping mall is 3rd rate suburban. Architecturally the buildings are without exception devoid of imagination with the nadir reached in Hoyle, Doran and Berry's Hynes Auditorium of 1970, which outdoes even Luckman's work in synthetic banality.

When John Collins became mayor in 1960 he sought out as BRA director, Edward J. Logue, then busy demolishing downtown New Haven. Kane Simonian, flexing his political muscle, objected and was awarded life tenure as Executive Director and Secretary of the BRA. His duties: placing ads in the papers and arranging board meetings. His salary: about the same as the governor's, $40,000 a year.

Collins and Logue came on like gangbusters- or rather, blockbusters. "In truth it can be said," wrote Logue in 1967, "that our major goal in 1960 was nothing less than the making of a 'New Boston'." "Its time again for grandeur of design in Boston," announced the 1965/1975 General Plan for the City of Boston. With the support of the banking and business community, Collins and Logue embarked on the most far reaching urban renewal program in the country. Again quoting Logue: "The nature of the old Scollay Square area was such

that no other approach (than total demolition) was possible or feasible. The net result was an opportunity to eliminate a hopelessly inadequate system of narrow winding streets and to replace them with a few major boulevards in scale with the Government Center development and the estimated traffic volumes." The precedence of the automobile as established by the Master Highway Plan of 1948 was thus conveyed to the local street.

As pointed out by Constantinos Doxiados, "In the 20th century, the unit of magnitude, man, has been replaced in our cities by a new unit, the automobile, which covers a proportionately much larger space, moves at a much higher speed, and brings its hard surface into conflict with the soft human body."

60.5 acres of "narrow winding streets" were leveled and joined to the 47 acres of rubble that had been the West End. 1,850 "dilapidated" buildings were demolished in Roxbury, 5,250 dwelling units eliminated in the South End, South Cove was flattened, and 250 food and fishing wholesalers were sent packing from the waterfront.

The city was carved up into projects according to an economically and politically motivated urban renewal plan, justified by that single illusive word "blight". For Nathan Glazer, "urban renewal was created by an alliance of those seeking reform and those seeking profit." The Federal Housing Act as amended provided condemnation powers of large tracts for private development.

In Boston the magic word "blight" was applied indescriminately to old buildings and neighborhoods regardless of fundamental condition. Perfectly innocent buildings were blamed for their temporarily blighted uses. "For most Americans," wrote Lewis Mumford, "progress

means accepting what is new because it is new, and discarding what is old because it is old."

Boston's sacrosanct urban renewal plan remained inviolate, despite discreditation, for nearly two decades, until the city's federal grants, which, by 1972 had reached $300 million, ran out.

What the promoters of urban renewal like Logue did not realize was that those "dilapidated" buildings and narrow winding streets were, in fact, the essence of Boston's character: its very identity. With their hell-bent-for-Houston attitude, they cut the heart out of the city they were hire to revive. 107.5 contiguous downtown acres were leveled and replaced by superblocks of Charles River Park and Government Center. Of the countless historic buildings in the two project areas, only 5 survive.

The architect I. M. Pei was retained by BRA director Logue to prepare a master plan for the Government Center, which would eradicate the designated blight of Scollay Square and its environs. Pei set to work in 1960 with the calculated naivete common to politicians and planners which holds that if you tear down the slums you'll get rid of the rats. Pei's plan along with his extensive subsequent work in Boston, from the distant shores of Dorchester to the Back Bay's western frontier, has demonstrated a total ignorance of and disregard for the city's character and historical development. His beautifully detailed abstract volumes and voids show little or no sympathy for their urban context.

Even in New Boston terms, Logue made a fundamental error in separating planning from architecture in the government center. The results comprised a vast, amorphous open space occupied and ringed

by an odd collection of buildings ranging in quality from Kallmann, McKinnell & Knowles' City Hall masterpiece to that shabby, dated and inarticulate mass, the JFK Building by Walter Gropius' Architects Collaborative.

When, as part of his masterplan, I. M. Pei decided to preserve all historic buildings in the area, he naturally turned to Boston's eminent historian, Walter Muir Whitehill, whose interpretation of historic was, in this case, restricted to buildings with "a long, local tradition of special usage." In all 60.5 acres Mr. Whitehill was able to locate only one small block which met his criterion. Sears Crescent, with its book selling tradition, was retained. Ironically, that tradition was broken when the Brattle Book Shop was summarily evicted in favor of uses more compatible with the new Government Center. Pei was pleased with Mr. Whitehill's selection since it provided a historic edge to his otherwise up-to-date plaza.

Mr. Whitehill, beloved and respected chronicler of the old was, at the same time, enthusiastic in his endorsement of the New Boston. The latter role seemed ill befitting, but he managed to carry it off as the consumate politician, offending few on either side.

Such ancient streets as Cornhill, Brattle, Elm and Howard, along with key urban loci like Scollay, Bowdoin, Haymarket and Adams Squares vanished without a trace. Some 22 existing streets were reduced to 6, and 26 old city blocks were consolidated into 4. With appropriate irony, Charles Bulfinch's own house and Bulfinch Place were replaced by the Saltonstall State Office Building, the work of New York's super commercial architect, Emory Roth.

Logue and Collins decided that the Central Business District required surgery of a less radical nature than that performed on Scollay and Bowdoin Squares. To accomplish this, Victor Gruen was returned to the scene of his earlier crimes as master planner. One positive aspect of Gruen's 1967 plan was his proposal to convert Washington and Summer Streets into pedestrian malls, implemented just last year and given the catchy title of "Downtown Crossing". While the concept is a success, the urban design is of decidedly uneven quality, due largely to the chaotic pseudo-victorian canopy over one sidewalk. In terms of design and dignity, architect Jim McNeeley's Temple Street pedestrian mall on Beacon Hill is far more successful, as was New York's Park Avenue in the early 1920s.

Other than suggesting this pedestrian amenity, the BRA's plan for the CBD was doctrinaire urban renewalism. Objectives were to "eliminate blighted conditions, deterioration, obsolescence, traffic congestion, incompatible land uses, and other environmental deficiencies; to facilitate sound development and orderly growth." To accomplish this it was deemed necessary "to adjust obsolete block, parcel and street patterns which hinder new development by private enterprise." Goodbye Boston!

Also encouraged were highrise towers overlooking the Common. Tremont-on-the-Common, a structure whose vulgarity is beyond compare, was completed a year later in 1968. The architect, imported from New York along with his design, was S. J. Kessler & Sons.

While the plan was only partially carried out, the highrise proliferation has been devastating to the area as has the blight of long-surviving parking lots. Fortunately such structures as the

Old South Building, H. H. Richardson's Hayden Building, and Jake Wirth's Restaurant, all scheduled to go, have survived.

Redevelopment of South Cove was promoted by Tufts University, interested in expanding its medical facilities. The BRA and Tufts agreed on the area's principal need: reshaping of its "crazy-quilt" street pattern. The project was described by Edward Logue as employing "the usual techniques of urban renewal: removal of dilapidated structures; improvement of the traffic circulation; provision of public utilities and municipal facilities." The plan produced by Hermann Field of Tufts in 1961 called for extensive clearance. Fortunately a few important "dilapidated" buildings like the Wilbur Theater and the Music Hall, scheduled to be replaced with a medical center, were saved- through no fault of Tufts or the BRA.

19 years later vacant lots persist. The several institutional buildings and housing complexes which were constructed stand in blissful isolation from each other and from the urban grain. Among these are the oversized Tufts New England Medical Center of 1973 and the Quincy Elementary School of 1976, both by the Architects Collaborative an addition to Don Bosco High School of 1975 by Halasz and Halasz, and a parking garage on the site of the Hollis Street Theater. Tufts is even now in process of constructing a huge new nutrition center which will straddle Washington Street.

In initiating South End urban renewal in 1965, Edward Logue's stated goal was "creating a new image for the South End..(note the PR term)..to rehabilitate, preserve, enhance and strengthen this neighborhood (by) removing the heavy concentration of blight." The new image turned out to be one of ethnic factionalism and architectural separateness.

The South End's coherent and consistent rowhouse plan was picked apart by random demolition of 1,400 cosmetically "dilapidated" structures. While some buildings were rehabilitated, they were overwhelmed by other products of renewal, namely, housing projects, apartment buildings, and the pervasive and persistent vacant lot. In few cases did new construction respect the strong historical pattern of the neighborhood; certainly not Villa Victoria, a Puerto Rican housing development designed by John Sharratt in 1974, which combined a row of rehab with a rather neatly detailed brick tower and ticky-tacky town houses planned in social and visual isolation from the South End fabric. Neither did the rash of routine apartment buildings with their long double-loaded corridors which sprouted like weeds in the vacant blocks. Typical were Sert, Jackson Associates' Tremont Homes of 1971 which directly contradict the Tremont streetscape.

One would have hoped that Governor Sargent's cancelling of the Inner Belt in 1970 would have signaled the death of urban renewal. Instead, the BRA steamrolled ahead by announcing Park Plaza in May of that year. Mortimer Zuckerman responded by hiring New York architects Davis, Brody Associates to pack 6 million square feet into a series of 40-and 60-story glass towers set in 2 superblocks. While politicians and planners were enthralled, neighborhood groups were appalled. Unfortunately opposition was directed primarily at the project's size rather than at its anti-Boston plan.

In 1975 Governor Dukakis injected the State Transportation Building, designed by Goody and Clancy, as a catalyst into a much reduced but faltering project. Mayor White, gung ho for the New Boston, had

backed Park Plaza enthusiastically from the beginning, but friend Zuckerman backed out in 1977 when his anticipated profit margin slipped to a reasonable level, leaving the embarrassed catalyst in search of a project. Stubborn bureaucrats pressed on regardless, with only the Transportation Building as firm, an $80 million, 870,000-square-foot, 850-foot-long uneeded behemoth. Today the situation is unchanged.

Despite its reduction, the Park Plaza plan has not fundamentally changed, with its superblocks, super plaza, mega structure, widened and straightened streets. If the plan is implemented, Park Square, one of Boston's few remaining principal nodes will disappear. Demolition has been completed on 14 irreplaceable historic buildings including 12, 14, 16 Carver Street from 1806, the former Union Oyster House buildings from the 1870s, and the Plymouth Theater.

Ian Menzies succinctly summarized the project in 1978: "Park Plaza wasn't a process, it was a political farce...a 1950 concept wrapped in a 1970 package, a project doomed to failure from the start."

The Jordan Marsh-Lafayette Place Project on Washington Street was the brain child of New York's Ben Frank, vice president of Allied Stores (Jordan's parent), who, in 1973, succeeded in convincing Mayor White and then BRA director Bob Kenney to reward Jordans with reduced taxes and an inflated price for its land in exchange for cutting its operation in half, demolishing its 16 historic buildings and replacing its richly varied Main-Shuman block with a 2-story suburban shopping center. Shuman's 1873 corner and N. J. Bradlee's 1860 masterpiece became architect Sumner Schein's 1977 banality. Also razed by Jordans were the elegant granite Allen Building and Sturgis and Brigham's

refined 1884 Bristol Block, along with 8 distinguished buildings comprising Jordan's annex. Although these were not the popular Freedom Trail type of landmark, they were all characteristic Boston buildings, vital to its fabric.

While Allied Stores has taken care of its own interests expeditiously, the Lafayette Place aspect of the project, an internally-oriented shopping mall and highrise office-hotel combination, still founders in search of financing, with only the city owned parking garage under construction. At last report project architects were Mitchell, Giurgola Associates of Philadelphia, whose only other Boston building is a waif-like 1971 branch library in the South End.

Other Boston neighborhoods such as Charlestown and Roxbury were equally hard hit by the New Boston bulldozers and planners. In Charlestown older buildings gave way in 1973 to Shepley Bulfinch's rambling and incoherent concrete Bunker Hill Community College and, in 1979, to developer James Adams' insulting Bunker Hill Mall.

Housing projects and rubble replaced Roxbury's faded mansions while municipal buildings and weeds supplanted its brick row houses. Marcel Breuer's mammoth education factory, Madison Park High School of 1976, thrusts a brutish shoulder in the face of neighboring genteel John Eliot Square. Only Beacon Hill and some of the outermost suburbs escaped being branded "New Boston".

The phenomenon of urban renewal is actually urban negation, in that its principal components, the super block, the super park, the super highway and separation of parts, are the antitheses of the historical city's structural ingredients, small blocks with varied buildings, naturally occurring integrated parks and plazas, narrow

streets and a sense of compactness; horizontal density rather than vertical density with horizontal sparseness.

The rationale for urban renewal and the New Boston has a long history from 17th century Versailles to the anti-urban expressions of Le Corbusier in the 1920s and slum clearance and public housing projects of the '30s and '40s.

Versailles was a criticism of the inelegance as much as the apparent incoherence of medieval Paris. This was similarly reflected in John Nash's early 19th century design for Regent Street and Waterloo Place in London, with their formal progression imposed on the existing erratic medieval plan.

As the 19th century wore on the negative effects of the industrial revolution caused critics to describe the city in such metaphors as "a chancre, a cancer, a leprous body." In 1844 Engels described the British industrial city as an "urban mess," a type of condition which provided grist for social novelists like Dickens and Zola. Others reacted by suggesting the replacement of large segments of the tainted city with more ideal environments such as Emile Muller's "Citē Ouvriere" for Mulhouse of 1853 and Henry-Jule Borie's "Aerodomes" for Paris of 1865.

In 1853 Napoleon III commissioned Baron Georges Haussmann to redesign Paris. Napoleon was concerned with upgrading real estate value and sanitizing the city but more specifically with ending pervasive riots by replacing the medieval pattern of Parisian streets with broad arteries which would permit the police to assemble and charge. Haussmann responded with a network of broad, straight boulevards criss-crossing the city which earned him the descriptive

title of "Attila of the straight line" from Victor Fournel in 1865. Needless to say the demolition program was massive. For Haussmann esthetics were secondary and only later did he embark on a belated attempt to embellish his avenues which had not originally been laid out for reasons of beauty. "Regularization" was a term he used. According to Francoise Choay, Haussmann attempted to "regularize the distorted city, to disclose its new order by means of a pure, schematic layout which will disentangle it from its dross, the sediment of past and present failures." As was the case in much of the planning for the New Boston, Haussmann completely neglected the capillaries and connective tissue of the minor streets.

One way of avoiding the inhospitable conditions of the city was to move to the suburbs where air was presumably cleaner and space more abundant. For Emile Cheysson, writing in Paris in 1886, "the ideal remedy to the present situation lies...in the construction of many isolated houses in the outer suburb, linked to the center by cheap transport." This pretty well describes Boston's so-called "streetcar suburbs" of that period.

From the suburb it was a short jump to the new town, detached from the city, in the form of the Garden City, a concept set forth in England by Ebenezer Howard in his 1898 publication, Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform. The founding of the Garden City Association a year later led to planning and construction of the first example, Letchworth Gardens, designed by Parker and Unwin in 1903. Garden City ideals spread to America and infused such developments as Sunnyside Gardens, New York, in 1924 and Radburn, New Jersey, in 1928, both by Clarence Stein and Henry Wright, as well as Greenbelt,

Maryland, by Ellington, Wadsworth and Walker begun in 1935. The most ideal extension of the Garden City philosophy found form in Frank Lloyd Wright's conception of Broadacre City in 1934, almost totally rural in its radical decentralization. Its least ideal extension became the pervasive post World War II subdivision, a pox on the American landscape.

Acting as a kind of link between Haussmann and Howard and the soon to emerge Le Corbusier, Tony Garnier began, in 1898, conceiving of his imaginary "Citē Industrielle", which was exhibited in Paris in 1904 and eventually published in 1917. Haussmann's hygienic reforms and wide straight streets along with Howard's greenbelts and open spaces were reflected in the Citē. Garnier was preoccupied with new techniques and materials, particularly concrete, as was Le Corbusier. As an admirer of Garnier, Corbusier wrote: "one experiences here the beneficent results of order; where order reigns, well-being begins." While Garnier looked on the machine as a means of emancipating the inhabitants of the city, Corbu carried this a qualitative step further by transforming the city itself into a technical machine.

Corbusier's ideals of urban design, which became the theoretical rationale for mid-20th century planning and the New Boston, were radically anti-city and, in essence, anti-human.

Le Corbusier extended his well-known dictum, "a house is a machine for living" into the production of the standardized city in his scheme for A Contemporary City for 3 Million People of 1922, his Voisin Plan for Paris of 1925, and his Ville Radieuse, conceived in 1930. Owing much to the Italian Futurists, such as the painter Boccioni, who, in 1912, wrote, "The era of the great mechanised individuals has begun,

and all the rest is Palaeontology," Corbu fused their passion for speed and mechanization with the greenery and open space of the Garden City.

Corbusier's brave new urban world consisted of undifferentiated sequences of austerely uniform towers arising from a rigidly geometric Cartesian grid separated by vast stretches of open space which incorporated a system of high speed autoroutes. Missing were a sense of individuality in architecture and a concept of containment of open space.

Wolf Von Eckardt refers to the "Corbuzation of a city" as destroying the street which "gives it structure and cohesion and is really the vessel of urban life." Hateful of the street, Corbusier wrote a diatribe against its complex multiplicity, its mess and confinement in 1925 at about the same time as he proposed his Voisin Plan for the historic center of Paris, which he referred to as "particularly antiquated and unhealthy." The old Parisian streets and blocks were to have been replaced by repetitious towers standing in superblocks with tremendous throughways gushing between them. "Man walks in a straight line," Corbusier said, "because he has a goal and knows where he is going," as compared with the "pack donkey's way" of old city streets. Though admitedly radical, Corbu failed to detect the basic incompatibility between his Voisin Plan and historic Paris. His words: "Set in juxtaposition the new business city does not seem an anomaly, but rather gives the impression of being in the same tradition and following the normal laws of progress."

Corbu held nothing but contempt for the intricate, asymetrical patterns of historic cities which proved so resistant to his geometrical

sense of order. In agreement with Kane Simonian, Edward Logue and other Boston urban renewalists he wrote: "We must demolish well, and firmly and according to a healthy program."

Parenthetically, while Corbusier's plan received little support in Paris at the time, his theories reincarnated there, as they did in America, during the 1950s and '60s in Front de Seine and La Défense developments, both completed, and Tolbiac Bercy, blocked by Jacques Chirac on his election as mayor in 1977. Quoting Chirac: "What was acceptable ten years ago in the name of vitalising Paris is more often seen today as the worst type of giantism. This corresponds to a new sensitivity which seeks to break radically with the concept of an ideal city as conceived by the architects and engineers of the post-war period working in the spirit of Le Corbusier... Nowadays efforts are being made to preserve the old city with its narrow streets, its tangle of traffic, irregular character and complicated structure."

Linking Corbusier's Voisin Plan with full-blown urban renewal are such large scale housing projects as New York's Parkchester of 1938, Stuyvesant Town of 1947, Boston's Cathedral Housing of 1950 by Harold Field Kellogg, and notorious Columbia Point. The formula was always the same: vertical density and separation of parts. What became landscaped open space in luxury developments like Charles River Park, turned into asphalt or weeds at low cost Columbia Point. These bargain basement bureaucratic versions of Le Corbusier's utopianism reached social bankruptcy when Pruitt-Igoe, designed by Yamasaki in St. Louis, was blown up in 1972.

To Vincent Scully urban redevelopment in America is "cataclysmic, automotive and suburban...exactly in accord with the most persistant

American myths and desires. The city is bad; tear it down, get on the road, be a pioneer, live in Greenwich like a white man."

The wide thoroughfare may hasten your arrival but too often, in the imortal words of Gertrude Stein, "when you get there, there is no there there." One reason for this vacuity of goals in the renewed city is the lack of "theres" along the way. In historic Boston, getting there is more than half the fun, for there is so much of interest enroute. The old city is a place to be in, not pass through.

"Many years ago," said Alec to his friend Milo in that children's classic, The Phantom Toll Booth, "on this very spot, there was a beautiful city of fine houses and inviting spaces, and no one who lived here was ever in a hurry. The streets were full of wonderful things to see and the people would often stop to look at them."

"Didn't they have any place to go?" asked Milo.

"To be sure," continued Alec; "but, as you know, the most important reason for going from one place to another is to see what's in between, and they took great pleasure in doing just that. Then one day someone discovered that if you walked as fast as possible and looked at nothing but your shoes you would arrive at your destination much more quickly. Soon everyone was doing it. They all rushed down the avenues and hurried along the boulevards seeing nothing of the wonders and beauties of their cities as they went."

For 300 years Boston's evolutionary development was both self-preserving and self-renewing. This natural process has since been interrupted by 30 years of self-serving and insensitive political intervention which, unfortunately, continues. The ease with which historic Boston was disposed of during the past 3 decades can in part

be explained by the fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of cities expressed by Msgr. Francis J. Lally, chairman of the BRA through much of the renewal era, when he said: "Why is the obsolescent city inadequate?... People. Cities are not architectural creations... cities...are people." The good father allowed his professional preoccupation with the human soul to unduly influence his view of worldly matters. Cities are containers of people, and if the container is changed as often as its contents, chaos results- which is exactly what happened in the case of the New Boston. What looked good on the drawing board did not automatically work in the real world of the crooked and narrow street.

A great city has a clear but complex identity. Its fabric bears the imprint of its unrepeatable, non-transferable character and is hospitable to almost infinite exploration and discovery. Old Boston embodied those essentials characteristic of all great historic cities: hotizontal density, an intricate and varied fabric, networks of sequences, continuity of the streetscape. Unfortunately, Boston's identity has been visibly eroded by gross overbuilding, the result of the failure of 3 successive mayors to institute a long range plan based on the city's historical characteristics and evolvement.

Lewis Mumford's recent evaluation of Boston was succinct: "Its destroying itself with highways and traffic and highrise." Columnist Herb Caen's comments on San Francisco, faced with a similar problem, apply precisely to Boston: "When you look at photos of the skyline of 1957 and compare it with today's it is hard to believe you are looking at the same city, which of course you aren't. The old city grew beautiful by accident, the new one is growing ugly by design."

And the New Boston continues to proliferate. In fact Mayor White, like a child with a new set of mammoth Lego blocks, made no attempt at concealing his delight last November when he quoted his current BRA director Robert Ryan as saying, "you're not going to recognize the skyline of Boston 4 years from now." New Boston has immediate plans to add no fewer than 6 40-story towers to its downtown inventory, not to mention the million-square-foot Federal Office Building which has not quite decided where to set down its Paul Bunyanesque footprint.

Today's urgent planning issue is protecting what remains of the real Boston, its character, its identity, its uniqueness deriving from its intricate street pattern, its integral system of parks and plazas, its well-known landmark jewels and its thousands of old buildings both modest and ornate which form the crown that holds those jewels. It is the connective tissue composed of these many often self-efacing structures which is essential but too often overlooked.

In the words of Hans Blumenfeld, "we must learn to plan a city in the way it would have grown if it had not been planned- if it could have had time to grow."

The situation with the New Boston vis a vis the historic city was pretty well summed up in a New Yorker cartoon by Charles Saxon some years ago. Approaching the city by train, one matron admonishes her companion thusly: "I feel I should warn you. They've taken down most of Boston and they're putting up something else."

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